



## Barbados

### International Religious Freedom Report 2005

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 166 square miles, and its population is approximately 277,000. Christianity is the dominant religion; over 95 percent of the population is considered Christian, although they may not be active in any particular denomination. The Anglican Church, the first denomination established in the country, constitutes the largest religious group, with about 70,000 members, a number that has held steady in recent years. About 65 percent of members are active in the Church.

The next largest denomination is the Seventh-day Adventists, numbering about 16,000 members, 10,000 of whom are active. The first Adventist missionary arrived in 1891, and the denomination has grown rapidly since incorporation in 1933.

The Roman Catholic Church has been present since 1839. There are about 11,000 Roman Catholics; an estimated 20 percent are active. In the early and mid-twentieth century, the Catholic Church was bolstered by immigration from Guyana, Dominica, St. Lucia, and by Syrian and Lebanese Christians from Trinidad. It is expanding slowly through natural growth and a small number of converts.

Pentecostals number about 7,000; membership is growing and over 50 percent are active. Methodists number an estimated 5,000, according to church officials, although many more claimed Methodist affiliation in the last official census; about 60 percent of members are active. There are approximately 2,500 Jehovah's Witnesses, and over 95 percent are active; membership grew by 3 percent between 2002 and 2003. Baptists, Moravians, and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) are present in small numbers.

The number of non-Christians is small. There are an estimated 2,700 Muslims, most of whom are immigrants or descendants of immigrants from the Indian state of Gujarat. A few immigrants from Guyana, Trinidad, South Asia, and the Middle East, as well as about 200 Barbadians, comprise the rest of the growing Muslim community. The first mosque was erected in 1950, and there are currently three mosques and an Islamic Center.

Other minority religions include Rastafarianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and the Baha'i Faith.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Government is secular and does not interfere with an individual's right to worship. The Christian holy days of Good Friday, Easter Monday, Whit Monday, and Christmas are national holidays.

Religious instruction is included in the public school curriculum as "values education." The focus is on Christianity, but representatives from minority religions are also invited to speak to students. The Rastafarian community has requested government assistance in setting up a primary school, stating that the government schools instill beliefs in their children that conflict with their faith--a situation that can only be rectified if the Rastafarians have their own learning institution. By the end of the period covered in this report, the Government had not responded to their request.

In 2002 and 2003, the Government held interfaith services to celebrate National Day. Most of the religious groups participated, although some evangelical Christian denominations refused to worship with non-Christians on the grounds that doing so would violate the tenets of their faith.

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

Religious groups must register with the Government if they wish to obtain duty-free import privileges or tax benefits, but no complaints were received that the process was onerous.

Foreign missionaries must apply for and obtain entry visas. These are obtained easily, and there are no other special requirements imposed to obtain them.

Adherents to the Rastafarian faith complained that the use of marijuana, used in their religious rituals, is illegal and that their members were victims of societal discrimination, especially in hiring. Following a prison riot in March 2005, prison officials shaved the dreadlocks of Rastafarian prisoners after the discovery of contraband in the hair of some members. Some of the prisoners complained that the shaving of their dreadlocks violated their religious rights.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

#### Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

#### Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. With over 125 denominations, the country has a history of being open to diverse faiths and forms of worship. Representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventist, and Muslim communities stated that they had experienced occasional criticism for their religious beliefs and practices, but generally felt that the society was very tolerant. Rastafarians complained that there was widespread discrimination against their members, especially in hiring and in schools.

The Barbados Christian Council and the Caribbean Conference of Churches conduct activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different denominations within the Christian faith.

#### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy also discusses freedom of religion with local groups and other organizations.

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